

Acts 10 | Dave Stough

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[0 : 00] All right, so, you know, I've been watching some funny YouTube videos this Thanksgiving weekend, and I found this one called Dad Jokes.

! And it sounds like some of the jokes that I hear some of these people before they start a sermon. And I was tempted. I was tempted. I was like, no, I just don't deliver them that good, I guess. That's fine. I like to start out with an illustration, though. So, imagine cutting a single rose off of a rose bush and sticking it in a glass of water. And it looks good, it smells good, but the reality is it's dying because you cut it off, right?

And you could put plant food in the water, sink it to, do whatever, but it's withering away because it's been cut off from its life source. The Bible says that just like that, we human beings are cut off from the source of our life. Our sins have separated us from our God.

Yes, we're physically alive, but when we're born, we're spiritually dead because of sin. I've talked to many people, and they tell me they feel great about their life.

[1 : 33] I talk to them about the Lord sometimes, and they basically are saying, leave me alone, I don't need that Jesus stuff. Sure, they're doing well. Sure, they look good. Good shape. Doing good in life. But so is that rose when it's in the water for a couple of days until later, right?

So the Bible says we're dead in our transgressions. When God created man, it says he made us in his image, and he breathed into us the breath of life, and man became a living soul.

In botanical science, it's been known for a long time, but there's that process called grafting, which allows us to take something like that rose flower and graft it back in to the bush from which it was taken, and there it receives new life again.

In much the same way, God makes it his business to restore sinners back to himself by the power of the Holy Spirit, by giving us life through faith in Christ.

Today, we're going to look in God's Word at a person who received that life from above. His name is Cornelius, and we're in Acts 10. New Testament book, Acts 10. You can turn there if you want. We will read some of it later. I will have it up on the screen too.

[3 : 09] So Acts 10 tells us how the Gospel first reached the Gentiles. Romans 1.16 says, Jew and Gentile.

So what really makes the distinction between Jew and Gentile? What is a Jew? In the most basic definition, a Jew is a physical descendant of Abraham through Isaac and Jacob.

God gave the covenant of promise to Abraham and then reconfirmed it with Isaac and Jacob. And then he changed Jacob's name to Israel, and Israel had 12 sons, which became the 12 tribes of Israel.

God made promises to these people. So eventually, the 12 tribes of Israel became known as Jews, a term coined for those who came from around Judea, a southern area close to Jerusalem, where the tribe of Judah is.

So Israel received four covenants in the Old Testament that distinguished them and separated them from the rest of the nations.

[4 : 52] And Gentile is simply a term that means nations. So anybody that's not a Jew is a Gentile. The book of Acts is the account of the dynamic work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of people, both Jew and Gentile, when the church first started.

The basic outline of the book is laid out for us in Acts 1.8, when Jesus says to his 11 disciples, but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and all of Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

This commandment sounds a lot like the one we read about at the end of Matthew, right? The Great Commission. When he earlier before this, before Acts 1.8, Jesus was with his disciples in

Galilee, and he told them to go make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Go make disciples of all nations. So we're in this timeline in the book of Acts, and I did some reading and trying to figure out some like, I remember Mark had mentioned last week that Stephen was like about maybe a year at the most away from Pentecost when the church first started.

And we know from Galatians 1 where Paul gives his timeline, and from secular history, that Acts chapter 10 took place somewhere between 6 and 10 years after Pentecost, about 5 years after the stoning of Stephen, full of 5 to 10 years after the stoning of Stephen.

[6 : 40] So it took them at least 6 years to go out to the Gentiles, to the other nations.

Why so long? The Lord Jesus, who rose from the dead and showed himself alive to these disciples, commanded them to go into all the world.

One of the most telling verses about the Great Commission not being at top of mind, we'll say for the apostles, is Acts 1.8.

It says at the time when Stephen was stoned, that there arose that great persecution of the church, and the people were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria, and it says they all were scattered except for the apostles.

They stayed in Jerusalem. It's like they were kind of holding the fort down there, right? And yet, they're the ones commanded to go. So I kind of took a fresh look at all that, and that would be part of the reason you have that handout in your hand.

[7 : 46] We'll go through some of that in a little bit. So, to understand this, we've got to put ourselves in the shoes of the apostles. As you know, the Lord Jesus came to Israel, presenting himself as their king.

The disciples believed in him, but as a nation, Israel did not. Disciples were still looking for him to set up the kingdom, though. But that was put on hold.

The Lord Jesus went to the cross, died for the sins of all mankind, rose from the dead, and ascended to heaven. And during those 40 days, between his resurrection and his ascension, it says in Acts 1-3, that he taught the disciples things pertaining to the kingdom of God.

I'll kind of be interested. What did he say? But it was things pertaining to the kingdom of God. When we were studying Matthew's gospel, we've seen that Jesus taught the disciples in parables that the kingdom, and other ways too, that the kingdom of heaven is going to be different for a while than what they expected.

Jesus taught the disciples that what it would be like in the kingdom between his first and second coming and those parables. The concepts, so if you're putting yourself in the shoes of the disciples, the concept that Messiah would die and rise, and that he would leave and come back again, that was new information for them.

[9 : 32] So you just kind of put yourself in their shoes for a minute. It was new information. Now, I think they could have known that, some about Christ dying from Isaiah 53, but remember he told them that he was straight up, that he was going to die and rise again several times, and they just didn't get it, right?

So the reality was that it was, in their minds, it was new information. And they didn't understand the earthly part of the kingdom of God was put on hold for a while.

They asked him, the reason I know that, Acts 1.6, they asked him, just before his ascension, Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?

We have to understand that the Old Testament law given to Israel by God and the promise of the Messiah ruling the world from a kingdom in Jerusalem were so ingrained in the Jewish way of thinking that it was almost impossible for them to let that go.

They could not at first disconnect the law and the earthly kingdom from knowing the Messiah. Say it again. They could not at first disconnect the law and the earthly kingdom from knowing the Messiah.

[10 : 57] it took time and revelation from God for that to happen. Much the same way it takes us time to learn from the Lord as He deals with us, each of us, individually.

So if you don't look at that handout I got, I hope this goes good. I made it in hopes of thinking it could aid us in thinking like a Jewish person.

I'm going to grab mine here. We'll come back to that page in the front. We'll go to the next page.

So, God gave four covenants. Three unconditional and one conditional. So, if you want to look at it, this, back in Genesis chapter 12, God told Abraham, He told him that He was going to make him a great nation.

Before this, when you read the Bible, you realize that God is dealing with mankind in like a general way. He's given us a conscience. He gave a conscience. He gave human government.

[12:16] And He's waiting for man to respond and these things aren't working. And so He says, I'm going to do something different. I'm going to make a great nation out of somebody who's fatherless. And He decides to reveal Himself to the world through this promise to Abraham.

Alright? And the promise, in essence, the unconditional promise, I hope you're on the right page, it says Abrahamic covenant. But, the parts that I want to point out to is God told Abraham, that from Him, this fatherless, 70-year-old something man, that from Him, He's going to have so many descendants that they're going to be innumerable.

And that those descendants will live in a very specific piece of real estate. And through Him, through what God's going to do with Him and His descendants, that all the world will be blessed. And the world was blessed through Abraham's ascendance by one, the Messiah coming, and two, God's Word coming through them. So, I want to point out one thing.

God's covenant with Abraham had no obedience clause in it. He put, you can read Genesis 15 and see that, but it's an unconditional covenant.

[13:29] Then there's this Davidic covenant where God made a promise to David after David wanted to build him a temple. And He promised that David's descendant, from Him, He would have a descendant that would sit on a throne, the throne in Israel, David's throne, and that He would have, it was an eternal throne.

So, Jesus Christ is King David's descendant that would sit on an eternal throne. We know that now. They didn't know that then. And then, go, skip over the new covenant and go down to the conditional covenant, the law.

That is the law. There's a couple things you've got to point out about this law. The law was a conditional covenant, if you obey, I will bless you.

If you disobey, I will curse you. The law was not designed to take away sin. The law was temporary. We know this from Hebrews and Romans. Okay? But keep in mind, these guys who are Jewish, this is part of what they understand their identity to be.

[14:49] Alright? And they didn't know this temporary aspect of it. Maybe they could have, but, you know, when they talked about the new covenant, but you've got to understand that that was who they were.

They lived in light of obeying the law. So, can you pull up that first slide, Kurt? Under the law, the temple was given because the law was given.

The temple was the way you approach a holy God underneath the law. The terms of the law. And as you guys know, there was blood sacrifices in this, but what I wanted to point out in this illustration where it says the court of priests, that's basically the design of the tabernacle right there.

No one was allowed in there except the priest. And of course, in the Holy of Holies, one priest, one time a year. And God was saying, if you, those who approach me must regard me as holy.

And all these ceremonial things to teach Israel, and more than Israel, though, I'll show you in a minute, that God is holy and He's unique.

[15:57] He's different than anything else in the world. So when the temple was built, they had a court. It's the court of the men of Israel. The women were not allowed there, and it was ceremonial type things.

It was called about being pure and impure. And so you see the court out, where it says the court of Israel, that's where the women were. And then beyond that, there's that wall, and beyond that, it's the court of the Gentiles.

There was a, God's design here for His nation Israel with these promises He gave them unconditional and conditional was that the world would understand that there's a, the one true God is in Israel.

And He wants them, He made a place for them to come. Okay? Now, they were farther away from the holiness, but, you know, the priests were the only ones that could really get close anyway.

That's the way the law worked. Keep in mind, it was not designed to take away sin, nor was it designed to be permanent, but I don't think the disciples understood that.

[17:00] Okay. And then we'll go to the New Covenant. The New Covenant is in Jeremiah, and it was given after the conditional covenant of the law was given.

It is paid for through the blood of Jesus Christ. And in this covenant, God writes His will, His law, on our hearts.

All right? And now, I want to point out that this covenant was also made with Israel. Okay? But in it, He says that everyone participating who believes and comes into this new covenant is permanently forgiven of their sin, and that everyone will personally know God, so even though the church is not the nation Israel, we partake in the spiritual aspects of the new covenant.

It says in Hebrews 8. And if you read, when you guys can look that up on your own, but there's those verses given in there that go over the spiritual aspects.

It's because we're grafted in. Romans 11. We are grafted in. All right? And we're not partaking in the physical aspects of the new covenant. But anyway, so in the mind of a Jewish person, all this was wrapped up in this one person coming who was the Messiah that was going to bring these things to them.

[18:29] All right. So, if you want to turn to that first page you got there, if you put yourself in their shoes, this is a prophet.

And prophets, what do they do? They speak about things in the future. They're usually warning Israel about things to come. And so the prophet had things he told them that came true in the prophet's own time.

But that usually revolved around what the law said. Right? So all prophecy revolves around these covenants. And so when you start looking at Christ's coming, they can't see these two mountains. And they can see, to them it looks like one thing. They can't see the gap between them, I should say. And they can't see the church at all. And this is the way the disciples were thinking in the early chapters of Acts.

They just didn't understand that Jew and Gentile would be in one body. And Ephesians 3 explains that. Okay? And it is a mystery in that they didn't know about it in the Old Testament.

[19:40] I thought it was kind of neat to put some verses down here that talked about Christ's first coming. And in the same verse, like in Isaiah 9, something happens, unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given.

First coming. And the government will be on his shoulders and he shall be called Wonderful Counselor of the Mighty God. Talks about the nations doing that. And that didn't happen, did it? But when it was prophesied, it's all in one verse and they're thinking that's what the Messiah is going to be. You can look up the other ones, but there's a distinction between his first and second comings and in those parables in Matthew, that's what he was trying to communicate.

There's this time period between here. The kingdom is going to be a little different. Okay, so I don't think I would have got it. You know what I'm saying? We just have the benefit of further revelation later on, right?

That's all we are. We're just the same as they. All right. So, anyway, the apostles did not, the disciples, the 12, 11, 12, they did not understand the law was temporary.

[20:51] The temple, you can take the temple down, you can take that slide down. They didn't understand that the temple would be done away with.

Keep in mind, it's still up in Acts 10. And they didn't understand that Jew and Gentile would be in one body until several years after Pentecost.

You can see that reflected in Peter's sermon in Acts 2 when he makes it sound like Christ is coming right now. And yet, think about it. Jesus commanded them to go to all the nations.

So, they did not have that information that we now have on that chart. So, if you think about it, they went from living under God's law as his prescribed way of showing they believed him to transitioning to not living under God's law as his prescribed way of saying you believe him.

That's quite a change. And that sounds like a contradiction, but it's really not when you understand the law is temporary and that Christ fulfilled the law.

[22:10] He died and rose again. Alright? And so, I think that's why it took so long for the apostles to even want to go to the Gentiles.

It took time and special revelation from the Holy Spirit for it to happen. So, we're going to read in Acts 10 about when it did happen.

We're not going to read the whole chapter. I'm going to go through some of it. We're going to read some verses here in just a minute. So, in Acts 10, we have two main characters.

Cornelius and Peter. Cornelius was a Gentile. He was a Roman soldier. And it says he was Italian. He was a commander of a hundred plus men, a centurion. Peter. He came all the way from Italy to Caesarea, which is a town a bit north of Jerusalem.

[23 : 15] Peter was, of course, Jewish, was one of the leading apostles in the church. And Peter also had traveled north of Jerusalem to a town called Joppa on the coast of the Mediterranean.

And he was staying at a guy's house named Simon also. It was Simon the Tanner. And Simon the Tanner was also a believer in Christ.

So, in this story, you have a saved Jew, Peter, encountering a Gentile, Cornelius, who was a sincere seeker of the truth.

And God is going to teach them both some things and bring them together. The opening verses in Acts 10 have some amazing things about Cornelius.

Amazing when you realize that he was not yet a believer. It says that he was a devout man, one who feared God. It says his whole household feared God.

[24 : 20] a just man that even had a good reputation among the Jewish people around him. And he was a generous man. He gave alms to the Jewish people.

He prayed to God continuously. In verses 4 and 31 of the text, it says that his prayers and his giving went up before God as a memorial.

I had a hard time with that for a while. I think that sounds like a believer. But I know from the text that he's not.

Peter even says it in chapter 11. God in his providence and foreknowledge set Cornelius in a place and time that he would seek him.

Cornelius was responding to the work of the Holy Spirit in his life to bring him to the point that he's seen his need to put his faith in Jesus Christ.

[25 : 28] It says in verse 37 of chapter 10 that Cornelius had some knowledge. Some knowledge of the Word of God. It says he knew the works that Jesus did.

Peter starts out a sermon. He says, and you know, he had some information about the message of the kingdom. If he had heard John the Baptist preach, I don't know, but I do know if he did, he did not believe that message.

Because we know from Acts chapter 19 there were people who did believe that and they were already disciples, it says. In the book of Acts, if you're a disciple, you're a believer. And it says that they only knew the baptism of John.

Well, this guy was not that way. In all likelihood, Cornelius was a Jewish proselyte, meaning he was a Gentile who understood the claims that the Jews made and he converted to Judaism.

That's an educated guess here based on what I'm reading. You see this in Acts 2 also. You see it in chapter 2. It even mentions that there were people who were converts to Judaism who came to Pentecost and they believed Peter preaching.

[26 : 52] They got saved. You see it in chapter 6 in Acts. It says, Nicholas, who was one of the I think seven deacons, he came to faith in Christ after being a Jewish proselyte.

And I think that's the case for Cornelius here also. In any case, you know that Cornelius was not a believer in Christ until he meets Peter later in our story.

It says in the chapter that Cornelius was praying and God sent an angel to him telling him to send for Peter. Cornelius had a soldier and a couple of servants underneath him that he trusted.

So he sent them under the following the instructions of the angel to go get Peter who was in that town of Joppa. The next day, Peter's on the rooftop of Simon Tanner's house.

It's lunchtime. He's up there praying and he gets hungry and he falls into a trance. And then he has this vision that God gives him of this sheep coming down out of heaven and it has all kinds of animals on it.

[28 : 00] Creeping things, wild beasts. And these animals were not the typical thing a Jewish person would eat. They were unclean animals. They were not kosher.

And a voice speaks to Peter when he sees this and he says, rise Peter, kill and eat. Peter says, not so Lord.

I live by the law. I can't do that. That's not who I am. I've never eaten anything common or unclean. And the voice speaks to him again and says, what God has cleansed, you must not call common.

This happens three times. What God has cleansed, you must not call uncommon. While Peter was thinking about that vision and what it meant, the Holy Spirit speaks to Peter and tells him about the three Gentile guys coming from Cornelius' house who just happened to arrive when the Holy Spirit was talking to him.

And the Holy Spirit says, go with them. I like this. The text says, the Holy Spirit says. You know, think about that for a while.

[29 : 21] We have that same Holy Spirit in us that wants to speak. And this is kind of the big, I'm getting ahead of myself, this is kind of the big takeaway from this chapter for me is God is so personally involved in each of our lives.

and sometimes as we just get busy and live life here in this world, oftentimes I'm starting to realize that oftentimes what I don't think is important is the very thing that God wants me to listen to him about.

You know, and no, does it necessarily audible? No, it doesn't have to be. Can it be? Sure. Sure. So, anyway, the Holy Spirit tells Peter, go with them and doubt nothing for I have sent them.

Under the law, you weren't supposed to go to a Gentile house. But he's telling them, don't doubt this. I've sent them. So they spent the night where Peter was and they arrived back in Caesarea two days later with Peter and six other Jewish guys who are believers in Christ with Peter.

Now keep in mind, according to that law, this is like taboo. So Peter's kind of, this is a new thing. He's stepping out. Because what would happen is it would make you ceremonially unclean to go to that temple.

[30 : 50] But when Peter arrived at the house, he did not hesitate to go in saying to Cornelius, this is verse 28, you are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate or visit a Gentile.

But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean. So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. May I ask why he sent for me?

So Cornelius tells him about his vision of the angel and Cornelius says, we're all here to listen to what God has told you.

Talk about an open door for a sermon, huh? So read along with me the rest of the chapter. We're in verse 34, okay? Peter began to speak.

I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism, but accepts everyone, every nation, the one who fears him and does what is right.

[31 : 52] You know the message God sent to the people of Israel announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached, how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil because God was with him.

Next slide. We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a cross, but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen.

He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead.

All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name. While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message.

The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God.

[33 : 38] Then Peter said, Surely no one can stand in the way of their being baptized with water. They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have. So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.

Then they asked Peter to stay with them a few days. Wow. Okay. I wanted to read that part because that's exciting. So that's the account.

That's how, why it took so long and how it happened. What can we take away from this today to help us draw closer to God?

I want to keep this simple. The primary lesson I think from this story is that it is the Holy Spirit that gives life.

The flesh profits nothing. The more we live life indulging the Spirit, the more of that life we enjoy now.

[34 : 49] the words of Jesus Christ are life source. That's what they are. Those words. The words of Christ.

In the New Testament it says, don't be drunk with wine, but be filled with the Spirit. And it says the same thing except saying being filled with the Spirit. It says, let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. the Holy Spirit brings those words to life for us. The Bible, it's a living word. The Holy Spirit wrote it and He makes it personal in our lives.

And that is how we get grafted back in as unbelievers to God. The life that God has is through the Spirit and the Word of God.

There's nothing that the world can offer that will ever be able to replace them. So the admonition to me, I mean, I know this is old news, but think about how important it is in our lives.

[36 : 04] How easily, if you're like me, you just don't do this. Right? But read them. Pray over them.

One thing you learn from this story is God is listening and He desires to answer our prayers. It may not be what we want or always when we want it, but if we're open to what God is doing, we'll hear His voice.

I realize that I'm talking to a mixed group of people here today. We're all at different places getting to know God.

It takes faith. Some of you may not yet have trusted Jesus Christ as your Savior. salvation is going from a dead man walking like the rose in the water to being alive and talking.

That is, talking to God and commuting with Him through His Word. Talking to the one who created you, loves you, and died for you.

[37 : 23] to you, if you're not sure if you're saved, I would say to you, read the Gospel of John and start praying and listening to God, what He has to say.

Believe me, the world's going to try to keep you from that. The world has very sophisticated lies.

Another big thing in the text, I think, for us to apply, you see that fearing God, praying to God, and listening to God, those were the hallmarks both of Peter and Cornelius.

They were men from very different backgrounds, yet they both desired to hear from God. And God was able to teach both of them new things that they needed to know to fulfill His will.

We have the musicians come back up. How about you? Are you open to something new the Holy Spirit wants to do in your life?

I got a text from Tom the other day a couple weeks ago and we were talking about new jobs and different things. He sent a verse somewhere in the Psalms.

[38 : 46] Is that Psalm 37? It says, Commit your way to the Lord. Trust also in Him and He will act.

I was like, I just didn't know how timely that was. I had people I was dealing with at work. And you know, that's the big thing I believe the Holy Spirit is teaching me is I don't have to go fix everything. I have to get out of the way and let Him work.

And there's a lot I have to learn. We know though that when the Holy Spirit does speak to us, that it will wind up with Christ being exalted.

Not us, with Christ being exalted. And whatever He's leading us to do. So the big admonition from the text today is to be open to new ways or new things that God wants to do in us and through us.

God's will doesn't change, but He changes us to do new things. And that story in Acts 10 is probably one of the best illustrations of it.

[39 : 58] Father, we thank You so much. We thank You, Lord, that You're willing to come here.

Lord, You're eternal. We're nothing. We're flowers that wither away.

Our lives are temporary. And yet, You desire for us to live forever with You. We thank You that You became a man. You stepped into time and place. And You love us so much that when we're sinning, we hate You, but You showed Your love that You laid down Your life for us even then while we were sinners.

Thank You for taking care of our sin, rising from the dead, and giving us life, working in our lives, individually. Help each of us to hear Your Holy Spirit afresh.

Amen.